

GAITHERSBURG

# GREEN MONTH

ONE CITY, ONE PLANET & YOU!

This year we are celebrating the 50th Earth Day, so we have come up with 50 actions to help make your life permanently more eco-friendly. Don't worry all of these activities come at low or no cost and can be done in line with all social distancing guidelines. For more ideas on how to be green subscribe to the **Green in Gaithersburg Newsletter**.

- 1. Calculate your carbon footprint.** Many of our daily activities - such as using electricity, driving a car, or disposing of waste - cause greenhouse gas emissions. Together these emissions make up a household's carbon footprint. Calculate your carbon footprint with the **EPA's Carbon Calculator**. Knowledge is power, use this tool to figure out what changes you make will have the biggest impact.
- 2. Understand the food, water, and energy nexus.** Did you know you need energy to get water and water to get energy and both energy and water to get food and in the case of biofuels, we need food to get energy. Our entire system is interdependent and we are depending on finite resources to sustain a growing population. Understanding the interconnectedness of our most important resources allows you to be a champion for change. Watch this quick video on **the food, water, energy nexus** to start your learning journey.
- 3. Get involved.** Currently, there are two vacant positions on the City of Gaithersburg's Environmental Affairs Committee. The EAC advises the City Council on actions the City should take to continue to be a leader in environmental health and protection. For more information check out to **City's website** and join us at one of our next meetings.
- 4. Save energy at home: Locate and seal any air leaks.** Check for indoor air leaks, such as gaps along the baseboard or edge of the flooring and at junctures of the walls and ceiling. Also check for leaks on the outside of your home, especially in areas where two different building materials meet. Other places to check for leaks include windows, doors, lighting and plumbing fixtures, switches, and electrical outlets. Also check for open fireplace dampers. See **detecting air leaks** for detailed instructions on finding air leaks yourself.
- 5. Save energy at home: Lighting.** Energy for lighting accounts for about 10% of your electric bill. Examine the light bulbs in your house and consider replacing inefficient bulbs with light-emitting diodes (LEDs). Your electric utility may offer rebates or other incentives for purchasing energy-efficient lamps. Also look for ways to use **controls such as sensors, dimmers, or timers** to reduce lighting use. Always turn off lights when they are not needed.
- 6. Save energy at home: Appliances.** Do you leave your phone charger and washing machine plugged in all the time. Phantom power occurs when even though a product is not in use it is still consuming electricity simply by being plugged in. **Check out how much energy each of your appliances uses and see where you can save.**
- 7. Save energy at home: Insulation.** Save energy and money on your electric bill by ensuring your attics, basements and crawl spaces are well insulated. You can rent a **thermal camera from the Montgomery County Library**. By using this tool, you can see where the heat or cold are coming in or escaping from.
- 8. Save energy at home.** Only heat and cool where you will be. Don't heat or cool your entire house, particularly those little-used areas. Close those vents and the doors to those areas and only open them when the room will be used.
- 9. Adjust your fridge and freezer temperature.** Set your fridge to 38 degrees F and your freezer to 5 degrees F.
- 10. Give your thermostat a nudge.** In winter, set your thermostat back when you're asleep, even more when away from home, and even more when on vacation. Do the opposite in the summertime. A programmable thermostat can do the work for you. As a general rule, move your heater thermostat down two degrees in winter and up two degrees in the summer. You probably won't even notice two degrees, but your energy bill will.

11. **Set the temperature on your water heater to 120 degrees.** It's safer, reducing the risk of scalding, and saves energy. When you go on vacation turn it down even further.
12. **Only purchase the groceries you need.** Did you know that food production is responsible for 25% of the entire planet's Green House Gas Emissions? From planting seeds to getting the food in your refrigerator food takes a long journey. Big-box and bulk purchase stores offer great deals, but if you are not actually eating everything you buy, it's a terrible deal for the planet. When you throw away uneaten food, you're also tossing the energy, seeds and water it took to grow and transport it right in the trash.
13. **Avoid single purpose trips.** Going to the grocery in the morning, the drug store at noon, and the hardware store in the evening means three trips there and back. Making the effort to plan and "batch" trips into one saves time, energy, and traffic woes.
14. **Buy local foods.** To reduce the distance from farm to fork. Buy straight from the farm, frequent your local farmers' market, or join a local food co-op. Did you know, that our regular Farmers Market vendors are offering delivery services! For more information and to place an order check out the [City's website](#).
15. **Buy organic foods.** Keep the environment (and your body!) free of toxic pesticides and support farmers and companies that use safer ingredients.
16. **Grow your own organic garden.** Or join a farm-share group. Harvest fruits and vegetables without having to go anywhere!
17. **Reduce your meat consumption** to curb carbon emissions from the livestock industry. If everyone in the country reduced their consumption of beef, pork, and poultry by a quarter and substituted plant proteins, we'd save about 82 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions per year. That would be a reduction of a little more than 1 percent. That action would also free up about 23 million acres of high-quality land, an area roughly the size of Indiana. Have you tried an impossible burger or beyond meat?
18. **Avoid using the kitchen sink disposal.** Though grinding food scraps and having them removed via wastewater treatment facilities is better for the environment than sending the scraps to the landfill, it's even better to compost food waste.
19. **Take shorter showers.** Trimming two minutes off your shower time can cut your water usage by 10 gallons. Try getting wet, turning off the water to soap up, and back on again to rinse.
20. **Fix leaky faucets and shower heads.** A faucet or shower head that drips 60 drips per minute wastes 5 gallons of water a day. That's 2,082 gallons per year.
21. **Install a low-flow shower head.** You probably won't notice the difference, but installing an efficient shower head can reduce your water usage by 2,700 gallons per year.
22. **Conserve water outdoors.** Only water your lawn in the early morning or late at night; even better, plant drought-resistant plants in dry areas and use water from rain barrels to take care of gardens and flower beds.
23. **Reduce first! We often forget the first R-Reduce.** By reducing the amount of trash you make by 10% you reduce carbon footprint by 1,200 pounds a year. The average American produces 4.4 pounds of trash each day. That means the average family of four can generate 17.6 pounds of trash a day. Every year, Americans produce 254 million tons of trash.
24. **Recycle right!** Recycling is an industry that is dependent on you only putting the right thing in the green bin. When in doubt, check the [City's new app Recycle Coach](#), where you can ask a coachling what goes where. You can also have the app remind you when to put out your recycling bin and alert you to any changes in the program. Anything you throw in that green bin that can't be profitably processed for recycling just ends up going from the recycling facility to a landfill or incinerator.

- 25. Avoid cosmetics that contain polypropylene or polyethylene.** These are common forms of plastic that are used for a variety of purposes in cosmetics and personal care products, including as a binder, thickener, film-forming agent, emulsion stabilizer, and abrasive. They are safe for your skin (may cause some irritation), but when you wash your face those micro plastics go down the drain and they may end up in oceans, seas and freshwater bodies worldwide.
- 26.** Keep our environment clean. Pick up litter in your neighborhood to prevent it from reaching our water ways.
- 27. Get great gas mileage just by keeping your tires inflated.** Under-inflated tires can lower gas mileage by about 0.2% for every 1 psi drop in the average pressure of all tires. Properly inflated tires are safer and last longer.
- 28. Manage the sunshine in your house.** Use reflective drapes to reflect the sun in the summer; in winter let the sun in to warm up your home.
- 29. Change your car's air filter(s) regularly.** Changing the air filter regularly helps prolong engine life because the air filter is designed to trap dirt and debris that can damage internal engine parts. Engine damage can occur from particles as small as a grain of salt and result in costly repairs. And it's not just your engine air filter! Replace your cabin air filter as well. It reduces the pollutants and allergens that get in your nose, and when it's clogged your engine has to work harder to heat and cool your cabin.
- 30. Install a rain barrel.** It can store water that would normally head for the storm drains, use it to water outdoor plants. Take a jug out to fill it to water indoor plants, too. The City can provide rebates via the Rainscapes Reward Program. For information check [the City's website](#)
- 31. Choose native plants.** Native plants can significantly reduce water runoff and, consequently, flooding, provide shelter and food for wildlife and support pollinators birds, butterflies, and other wildlife by providing diverse habitats and food sources. To find out what is native to Montgomery County check out [the University of Maryland Extensions page.](#)
- 32. Grasscycle.** Grasscycling might be more of a non-action than an action, but by just leaving grass clippings on your lawn, you are providing a natural fertilizer to your lawn.
- 33. Use electric or manual lawn mowers; switch to a mulching blade.** If your mower doesn't have one – it's better for the environment, better for your grass, and less hassle than bagging cuttings.
- 34. Run your dishwasher only when it is full.** To save both water, energy, and effort at home. The half load option does not cut the energy use in half. When doing dishes by hand try not to let the water run in between dishes.
- 35. Switch to renewables.** Did you know that Maryland residents can choose who supplies their energy? We selecting a supplier that uses renewable energy such as solar power or off shore wind energy, you are supporting the advancement of renewable energy infrastructure.
- 36. Switch to 100% recycled copy paper.** 100% post-consumer recycled paper drastically reduces the paper industry's impact on the planet. Purchasing recycled paper saves 100% of trees, 31% of energy, 53% of water, and produces 39% less solid waste. For each recycled ream of paper that's purchased, you will save 19 pounds of CO2.
- 37. Purchase products made from recycled material.** Buy purchasing products made from recycled material, you are reducing the carbon emissions associated with the product, and also creating demand for manufacturers to use more recycled materials. You can find dog toys, hand bags, trash cans, plates and really anything you can think of made from recycled materials.
- 38. Bank on-line – not in line!** Most banks now have phone apps that allow you to deposit checks on-line. They work by sending a picture of both sides of the check to your bank. Most banks have programs that allow you to pay all your bills online. If the recipient isn't in their database they mail a physical check. In many cases there are no charges for this as it is included as part of your checking account.

**39. Reduce fertilizer and pesticide use.** Much of what goes on your lawn ends up in the groundwater, or worse washes toward the curb and into the storm drains – which ends up in the Chesapeake Bay. Fertilizers create great conditions for algae, contributing to algal blooms, and pesticides wreck all kinds of havoc with marine life.

**40. Use cloth towels.** If you approach your cloth towels and napkins conscientiously, cloth is the greener option. Some say that washing cloth must be more energy-intensive than using paper, but electric dryers are actually twice as energy-efficient as the manufacture of paper towels.

**41. Go paperless. Did you know that fiber (paper and cardboard) makes up 40% of the solid waste in our landfills?** Most businesses, banks, utilities, and government agencies are capable of, and encourage you to get your bills and statements electronically. You'll be saving trees and the energy it takes to deliver your bills by truck.

**42. Telework. Many people have had to transition to telework during the COVID-19 pandemic.** By keeping people off the road, we have seen a dramatic dip in the amount of air pollution. Take the time to measure your productivity and make the case for transitioning to telework, even if it is just part time, after the pandemic is behind us.

**43. Buy less clothing.** Worldwide, 80% of used textiles end up in a landfill. Fast fashion is a very real threat to the environment, so try to only buy the things that you truly need and love. Even better, buy second-hand to break the cycle of over-consumption. After all, a healthy planet never goes out of style.

**44. Donate your old clothes.** Instead of throwing them out. When you need something, consider buying used items. The production and disposal of textiles is resource intensive. Cotton is a thirsty crop, requiring 2,700 liters of water—what one person drinks in two-and-a-half years—to make one cotton shirt. Consumers throw away shoes and clothing (versus recycling) an average of 70 pounds per person, annually. A few communities have textile recycling programs, but about 85% of this waste goes to landfills where it occupies about 5% of landfill space and the amount is growing.

**45. Do a plastic inventory.** We all know that plastic free and reusable items are better for the environment. Still, we challenge you to look around your house and see how many you are actually using and make changes where possible.

**46. Reuse whenever you can.** Yes, recycling is great. Still, it can be easy to forget that recycling consumes a lot of energy too. You know what takes less energy? Reusing items!

**47. Support forest protection organizations.** Planting trees is awesome, but it takes decades to foster the biodiversity and complexity that preexisting forests have. The older the forest, the more it's able to trap and synthesize carbon dioxide. That's why it's so important to invest in protecting the forested lands that are currently in danger.

**48. Have a conversation.** Too many people think that climate change is too big, too far away or too science-y to understand. Check out Katherine Hayhoe's [\*\*TED Talk\*\*](#) to learn more about the importance of chatting about the earth.

**49. Use environmentally friendly, non-toxic cleaning products.** They clean just as well, and cut back on toxins in the environment. Many times, they are made without animal testing as well.

**50. Share your success and your ideas!** Sustainability is contagious. Did you know that people are significantly more likely to add solar panels to their homes if they see a neighbor has already done it? Share your story with friends, colleagues, neighbors and everyone you meet.

